

VZCZCXRO0747
RR RUEHDE RUEHDIR
DE RUEHMS #0106/01 0371257
ZNR UUUUU ZZH ZDK SLUG
R 061257Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9241
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0149

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000106

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP, G/TIP, DRL AND NEA/MEPI
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR FOR JAMES RUDE; C. PONTICELLI

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [KWMN](#) [SMIG](#) [ELAB](#) [KMPI](#) [MU](#)
SUBJECT: MINISTER OF MANPOWER HIGHLIGHTS ANTI-TIP EFFORTS

REF: A. 07 MUSCAT 193

[1](#)B. MUSCAT 43
[1](#)C. 07 MUSCAT 298
[1](#)D. 07 MUSCAT 1116

MUSCAT 00000106 001.2 OF 002

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: During a February 4 meeting with the Ambassador, Minister of Manpower Juma bin Ali Al Juma detailed his Ministry's anti-trafficking in persons (TIP) measures, including: publishing a brochure for newly-arrived foreign workers to educate them about their rights; issuing new occupational health and safety regulations specifying minimum acceptable conditions in company-owned "labor camps;" building the capacity of Ministry of Manpower (MOM) labor inspectors to enforce labor laws and regulations; increasing penalties for abusive labor practices; and encouraging labor exporting countries to improve their regulation of recruitment agencies. Juma is open to USG support on TIP and would welcome an invitation to visit the United States to discuss trafficking and other workforce issues. End Summary.

- - - - -
Raising Workers' Awareness of their Rights
- - - - -

[1](#)2. (SBU) Minister of Manpower Juma used a February 4 meeting with the Ambassador to highlight a number of concrete steps his Ministry is taking to prevent labor exploitation and combat TIP. Juma provided the Ambassador with copies of a brochure titled "Guidelines for Foreign Manpower in the Sultanate of Oman," which the MOM developed in cooperation with embassies of the primary labor exporting countries to Oman (ref A). The brochure, which the Ministry published in nine different languages including Urdu, Hindy, and Malayalam, highlights certain rights and services to which all workers are legally entitled, including: health and personal injury insurance; adequate compensation for overtime work; and the right to strike in accordance with Omani law. The brochure lists the MOM's labor abuse hotline number and instructs workers to contact the MOM if they have a complaint about their sponsor or working conditions; it also details some of the penalties for violating Oman's labor laws. Juma said that the MOM and Royal Oman Police (ROP) Immigration soon will begin distributing the brochure to all newly-arrived workers at airports and other points of entry.

- - - - -
Promoting and Protecting "Decent Work"
- - - - -

13. (SBU) Juma continued that the MOM is working closely with the International Labor Organization (ILO) on a comprehensive initiative to protect workers and improve working conditions.

Under this initiative, the MOM partnered with business groups and the General Federation of Oman's Laborers to create new occupational health and safety regulations that are in line with ILO standards. The regulations include industry-tailored specifications covering, for instance, the number of toilet facilities, windows and air conditioning units required in company-owned and operated worker accommodations locally known as "labor camps." The Ministry of Legal Affairs currently is reviewing the regulations after which the MOM will issue them in both English and Arabic, finally replacing Oman's outdated regulations that the Ministry last issued in 1982. Juma explained that with these regulations, workers, companies and labor inspectors should have a common understanding of what constitutes acceptable working conditions.

14. (SBU) As part of another MOM program, the ILO trained approximately 100 MOM labor inspectors in June 2007 in the requirements of core ILO conventions; how to gather evidence and prepare reports; and, in a session by Roger Plant, Director of the ILO's Special Action Program to Combat Forced Labor, how to recognize the signs of trafficking. The MOM subsequently published a handbook for labor inspectors to use on the job, and sent ten of the inspectors to Singapore for further training. The MOM now has enrolled all of its inspectors in a six-month English language course, Juma said, so that they can better communicate with foreign workers. Juma further reported that the Ministry plans to launch a public awareness campaign via television and radio in March 2008 to promote the rights and safety of Oman's foreign and domestic workforce.

- - - - -
Improving Legal Protections
- - - - -

MUSCAT 00000106 002.2 OF 002

15. (SBU) Juma also stated that his Ministry is taking legal steps to combat labor exploitation. The Ministry is preparing amendments to Oman's 2003 Labor Law to increase financial penalties against employers and recruitment agencies who illegally charge workers for employment services and maintain unsafe or substandard workplace conditions. In order to prevent employers from hiring illegal workers, who often are most vulnerable to abuse because of their illegal status, the Ministry plans to increase the fines for employers from 100 Omani Riyal (OR) to 1,000 OR -- roughly USD 2,600 -- per foreign worker hired without an MOM-issued permit. Finally, Juma said that he and his staff have been involved in drafting Oman's anti-TIP legislation, which he indicated will include stiff penalties for trafficking crimes. He confirmed reports that the law currently is with the Council of Ministers and should be passed "very soon" (ref B).

- - - - -
Cooperation with Labor Exporting Countries
- - - - -

16. (SBU) Juma reiterated that labor exporting countries need to increase their regulation of recruitment agencies if there is to be real progress in combating TIP. No matter what Oman does, he said, "all of it will be brought down" if sending countries do not take their own measures to protect workers before they depart for Oman or other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Juma said that during the January 21-23 GCC-Asia Labor Forum in Abu Dhabi, he asked Asian representatives to restrict the number of officially-licensed recruitment agencies, which would make it easier for exporting countries to investigate and punish instances of abuse and for agencies in Oman to identify legitimate partners. He stated that the Philippine government seems to

have done the most to crack down on abusive recruitment practices. However, the MOM continues to have trouble with agencies in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka that force many workers into debt by charging large sums of money for recruitment services (ref C). The Ambassador suggested that the USG may be able to encourage these governments to increase their oversight of recruitment agency activities (ref D).

- - - - -
Open to US Support
- - - - -

¶17. (SBU) After outlining his Ministry's efforts to increase protections for foreign and domestic workers, Juma invited the Ambassador to indicate ways that the MOM could improve its anti-TIP efforts. He further asked the Ambassador to share specific information about TIP abuses in Oman so that the Ministry could focus resources to address them. The Ambassador responded that we would query Washington about training opportunities that meet Oman's needs, especially regarding screening vulnerable populations for trafficking victims. The Ambassador also repeated a suggestion that he first made in March 2007 that Juma visit the U.S. at the head of an Omani delegation to discuss labor and trafficking issues (ref C). Juma expressed strong interest in making the trip, and thanked the Ambassador for the USG's ongoing support, including the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI)-funded ILO program, of his labor reform efforts.

- - - - -
Comment
- - - - -

¶18. (SBU) Juma is proving to be an important partner in our efforts to promote labor reform and combat TIP in Oman. Under Juma's leadership, the MOM has enacted practical measures to improve working conditions and prevent the circumstances under which TIP can occur. Although he gave the Ambassador no indication that the Council of Ministers had tapped him to serve as the Chairman of Oman's National Committee for Combating Human Trafficking, contacts at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicate that he may be a leading candidate (ref B). Post will continue to identify ways to support Juma and the MOM, and we encourage the Department to facilitate an official visit for Juma to the US. Post will send its request and programming ideas septel.
GRAPPO